UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-FIFTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
57th meeting
held on
Monday, 13 May 1991
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 57th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 157: FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA (continued)

This record is subject to correction.
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/45/SR.57
16 May 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

91-55714 3671S (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 157: FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA (A/45/241/Add.1 and A/45/1011)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that at its 75th plenary meeting, the General Assembly had decided to include in the agenda of its forty-fifth session an additional agenda item entitled "Financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara" and to allocate that item to the Fifth Committee. In view of the urgency of the matter, and considering that the Fifth Committee must also report to the General Assembly on agenda item 132 entitled "Financing of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group", he proposed that the Committee should hear introductory statements on the new item 157 and that Ms. Mustonen (Finland), Vice-Chairman of the Committee, should coordinate the preparation of a draft resolution on the matter. If he heard no objection, he would take it that that procedure was agreeable to the Committee.

2. It was so decided.

3. Mr. AHTISAARI (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) (A/45/241/Add.1). He wished to convey the Secretary-General's serious concern regarding, in particular, paragraph 15 of the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/45/1011).

4. In his report to the Security Council (S/22464), the Secretary-General had emphasized the special nature of MINURSO. The holding of a referendum for self-determination for the people of Western Sahara was a complex exercise which involved, inter alia, the identification and registration of voters under free and fair conditions and the release of political prisoners, based on the assessment of an Independent Jurist. MINURSO would also be required to monitor the presence of remaining troops in the Territory and the operation of the local police and to ensure that law and order prevailed during the referendum. The role of MINURSO went beyond the merely supervisary tasks of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), in Namibia, for MINURSO would actually be involved in the conduct of the electoral process at each stage. While MINURSO appeared to be smaller in scale than UNTAG, its functions would be extremely sensitive. For that reason, the Secretary-General was especially concerned about the proposal to downgrade the levels of senior personnel. It would be inappropriate, for example, for the Force Commander to serve as Deputy Special Representative, as ACABQ had proposed. The Secretary-General had indicated in his report to the Security Council that the Deputy Special Representative should be a civilian. The proposal to downgrade the status of the Independent Jurist was also unclear, especially since, based on the experience in Namibia, he would probably be employed on an "as required" basis.

(Mr. Ahtisaari)

5. In conclusion, recommendations to reduce staff and other resources, based on tasks and local conditions, should not imply that the Mission was less important; downgrading the status of the senior personnel of MINURSO would send an inappropriate signal. He therefore requested the Committee to approve the senior level posts at the levels requested by the Secretary-General.

6. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Secretary-General was requesting $180.6 million ($176.9 million net) for MINURSO for approximately nine months. In addition, the Secretary-General had estimated the cost of repatriating Western Saharans under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at $34.5 million. That requirement would be met from voluntary contributions.

7. The Advisory Committee had exchanged views with representatives of the Secretary-General regarding the repatriation costs. It had noted that the Secretary-General would inform the General Assembly that MINURSO should not be deployed unless he had been unequivocally assured that the $34.5 million required for that purpose had been raised.

8. The Advisory Committee had considered the repatriation exercise under MINURSO very much in the light of the UNTAG experience. In paragraph 8 of its report, the Advisory Committee urged the Secretary-General to take immediate steps to raise $34.5 million and report to the General Assembly on the status of funding the repatriation operation as early as possible before the transitional period began.

9. In examining the estimates for MINURSO, the Advisory Committee had noted the Secretary-General's statement to the Security Council, contained in document A/45/241/Add.1, paragraph 5, that the budget should be adopted without change and that it should be reviewed after six months, at which time any necessary adjustments could be made. The Advisory Committee had discussed the meaning of that statement with representatives of the Secretary-General and its views in that regard were set forth in paragraph 3 of its report. In the interest of avoiding confusion in the budgetary process, the Advisory Committee trusted that statements of that nature would be avoided in future.

10. The MINURSO estimates had been prepared on the basis of a "worst-case scenario". A number of uncertainties remained with respect to the full implementation of the operational plan in the sequence outlined in the reports before the Security Council and the General Assembly. Furthermore, the estimates did not take into account facilities and voluntary contributions which might be offered to the United Nations. The Advisory Committee hoped that every effort would be made to seek such facilities and voluntary contributions, which would make it possible to realize substantial savings. In paragraphs 10 to 18 of its report, the Advisory Committee referred to a number of aspects of the operation where considerable savings might be realized. They included, in particular, areas where voluntary contributions might offset the cost of budgeted services.

(Mr. Mselle)

11. The recommendations contained in paragraph 19 of the report were designed to facilitate decision-making. The Advisory Committee recommended that the cost estimates of the Secretary-General should be approved in principle and that $140 million net, or $143 million gross, should be appropriated and assessed on Member States for the initial six months of the operation. That meant that the General Assembly would be approving in principle $180.6 million gross ($176.8 million net) but assessing a lower figure. When administering the amounts to be appropriated and assessed, the Secretariat should bear in mind that the difference between the assessed amounts and the proposed estimates was not available to the Secretary-General for commitment and that he would have recourse to part or all of the balance only after a performance report had been submitted for consideration by the General Assembly after six months.

12. In preparing the performance report, the Secretary-General was requested to give full consideration to the observations and recommendations contained in the Advisory Committee's report. The appropriation and assessments for MINURSO for the remaining three months would take into account the detailed performance report by the Secretary-General and the impact of any facilities and voluntary contributions made available to him.

13. The Advisory Committee was somewhat puzzled by the number of high-level posts contemplated for MINURSO, which, in its view, would be a relatively small-scale and short-term operation. The Advisory Committee recommended one Under-Secretary-General and one Assistant Secretary-General post for the mission. Lastly, the Secretary-General was requested, in addition to submitting a report to the General Assembly on the status of funding for the repatriation operation, to submit to the Advisory Committee the related UNHCR cost estimates.

14. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands) expressed the hope that statements such as that referred to in the final sentence of paragraph 3 of the Advisory Committee's report would indeed be avoided in future.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.